

(Mr. GOHMERT addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. FORTENBERRY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Mr. Speaker, Congress is currently engaged in a very important debate on health care. It's complex, and Americans deserve an informed and transparent debate. Yet while this discussion continues, there is a country roughly 7,000 miles from here where nearly 35,000 American lives are on the line every day, and Congress has yet, given the changing circumstances there, to fully engage in a focused discussion with our military leaders on a comprehensive strategy for Afghanistan.

Since I was elected in 2004 and like so many of our colleagues, I have attended the funerals for fallen Nebraska soldiers. I've stood next to widows, whose young children were not of age, to comprehend the magnitude of the family loss. And yet when the time came, I did make the difficult decision to support sending more troops to Iraq in what was called a "surge." It was the right call.

I have continually met with those who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, and I recently met with those who are preparing to redeploy. Their dedication to service and their commitment to our country continues to inspire me and the families they leave behind. The solemn responsibility for their lives continues to weigh very heavily upon us all.

Mr. Speaker, Afghanistan is facing complex security and governance challenges, and the situation demands engagement by this legislative body now. Although the administration developed a strategy for Afghanistan in March of this year, there is still a lack of clarity, some seeming uncertainty and certainly a hesitation to fully engage Congress in order to move forward in a decisive manner.

Many Afghan people have braved threats of brutal violence in order to vote. Our troops are courageously fulfilling their duties, and there is concern that their resources are stretched to the limit. None of us wants our soldiers at risk nor the opportunity for stability in Afghanistan to slip away.

The administration's top field general and the national security adviser are reflecting differently on the security situation in Afghanistan. General Jones stated on October 4, "I don't foresee the return of the Taliban, and I want to be very clear that Afghanistan is not in danger, imminent danger, or falling."

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Yet our senior military commander, General Stanley McChrystal, assessed

that "the situation in Afghanistan is serious; neither success nor failure can be taken for granted. Although considerable effort and sacrifice have resulted in some progress, many indicators suggest the overall situation is deteriorating."

We in Congress need to know, which is it? While we are responsible for funding and equipping the troops, the administration needs to define the next way forward, and this House needs to challenge the decision paralysis that threatens our mission in Afghanistan with each passing day. Until recently, the war in Afghanistan was the other war, the forgotten war, said by some to be the right war.

Mr. Speaker, as much as anyone, I would like to wait and to make sure that all is in order, but Afghanistan is slipping. According to General McChrystal, "Failure to gain the initiative and reverse insurgent momentum in the near term (next 12 months)—while African's security capacity matures—risks an outcome where defeating the insurgency is no longer possible."

In his initial assessment of the security situation, General McChrystal requested up to 40,000 additional combat troops. This is going to be a very tough call for all of us. Clearly, General McChrystal's judgment is based on keen insight about what it will take to prevail.

The American people deserve to know the unvarnished truth about the situation in Afghanistan and the fundamental purpose for our being there. Military families deserve to know the truth about the challenges facing their loved ones. Americans need to know that the administration is committed to a plan for success that minimizes our casualties, stabilizes the country, and brings the main contingent of our troops home quickly.

Let me venture to say that this is not just an American problem. The situation in Afghanistan and, for that matter, in Pakistan poses an international security threat, one that demands a shared response from the members of the international community. Pakistan has exhibited a stronger will of late to engage in the ungoverned tribal regions bordering Afghanistan.

Yet we have witnessed a curious range of responses by other governments. Some who see the urgency join us, others sit back hoping that we will save the day, and yet others exploit international tensions for economic and geopolitical gains. While it may be difficult to engender the will to send combat troops, our partner nations must help provide resources to stabilize Afghanistan.

Just as General Petraeus returned from Iraq to testify about the impact of the surge, I believe it would be helpful for President Obama to instruct General McChrystal to forthrightly articulate before this House his views, concerns and professional judgment.

Eight soldiers, Mr. Speaker, were killed yesterday. We need to develop adequately informed conclusions about the resources needed, Afghan capabilities, and international will.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. KAPTUR addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. MCHENRY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. MCHENRY addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

AFGHAN WAR

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Speaker, I want to start by reading from the October 27 front page of the Washington Post: U.S. Official Resigns Over Afghan War.

"When Matthew Hoh joined the Foreign Service early this year, he was exactly the kind of smart civil-military hybrid the administration was looking for to help expand its development efforts in Afghanistan."

Mr. Speaker, I want to say to Captain Hoh, retired marine, thank you for having the courage to speak out and to speak out on what you believe is the right policy for this Nation in Afghanistan.

I want to read parts of a letter that he wrote to Ambassador Nancy Powell when he resigned his position:

"I have served 6 of the previous 10 years in service to our country overseas, to include deployment as a U.S. Marine officer and a Department of Defense civilian in the Euphrates and Tigris River valleys of Iraq in 2004–2005 and 2006–2007. I did not enter into this position lightly or with any undue expectations nor did I believe my assignment would be without sacrifice, hardship or difficulty. However, in the course of my 5 months of service in Afghanistan, in both Regional Commands East and South, I have lost understanding of and confidence in the strategic purposes of the United States' presence in Afghanistan. I have doubts and reservations about our current strategy and planned future strategy, but my resignation is based not upon how we are pursuing this war, but why and to what end. To put simply: I fail to see the value or the worth in continued U.S. casualties or expenditures of resources in support of the Afghan Government in what is, truly, a 35-year old civil war."

He further writes in the letter to Ambassador Powell, Mr. Speaker:

"This fall will mark the eighth year of U.S. combat, governance and development operations within Afghanistan.